

## National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans

By; William White Staff Writer, Opelika-Auburn News and www.oanow.com

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TUSKEGEE, AL - Emma and Hunter made Valentine's Day special for two veterans on Friday. Valentine's Day came a day early as volunteers delivered hundreds of handmade cards through the wards of the Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System's West Campus in Tuskegee.

Sherman Lee Burford, chief of chaplain services, gave the invocation. Burford, a veteran himself, received one of the brightly colored, red and white Valentine bags as he came into Building 90

Sharing the card's inscription, Burford said, "It says on the front, 'I like you.' On the inside it says, 'I love America, I know you do too. I'm giving you this Valentine to send my thank you."

He said that at the top, on the inside, written in big crayon letters was



CAVHCS inpatient Veterans on both the Tuskegee and Montgomery Campuses were visited by active duty personnel from Maxwell AFB, Junior ROTC units from throughout Central Alabama and even the Halcyon Elementary School Choir during this year's National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans. "I like you" and at the bottom, "Love Emma."

"I don't have the foggiest idea who Emma is, but I can tell you right now, Emma made my day," he said.

On the third floor of Building 62, students walked the hall handing out cards to veterans. "It says Happy Valentine's Day from Hunter," said Veteran Ronald E. Jackson, 60, as he read one of the cards from his bag delivered by Junior ROTC students from Booker T. Washington High School. "I don't know if Hunter is a girl or a guy, but it is nice. It is homemade. It makes my Valentine's Day."

Other cards and notes in his bag were from members of Crawford

Please see 'Salute'

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## **CAVHCS Hosts Visit from HVAC Staffers**

Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System's (CAVHCS), Montgomery VA Medical Center recently hosted a one-day, fact-finding visit by two members of the U.S. House of Representatives, Committee on Veterans Affairs. Minority Staff Director Arthur Wu and Majority Professional Staff member Dion Trahan, both with the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, visited CAVHCS during a three-day trip that included visits to Little Rock VAMedical Center in Arkansas and the VA's Business Offices in Austin, TX.

During their visit the staffers were briefed on a range of topics including effective internal controls; compliance with the Federal Acquisition Regulation and Third Party Collections. They also toured the facility and then received additional briefings on reducing pharmacy wait times, CAVHCS' patient centered care initiatives and suicide prevention.



Representatives, Committee on Veterans Affairs staffer Arthur Wu (top left center and far right) visited CAVHCS' SPD, CensTrak system and sanitizing area after being briefed by Network Director Dr. Lawrence Biro (top center, far right) while fellow staff member and Veteran Dion Trahan registered with the Departemnt of Veteran Affairs.

## From the Director

Shirley Bealer, MS, RN, CNAA, BC, CPHQ

February has been a very eventful month. From National Salute to Hospitalized Veterans and Congressional staffer visits to Black History Month, blood drives, Groundhog Shadow Day, ongoing construction and the addition of new personnel throughout the system we've all been busy.

One constant has been your dedication and commitment to delivering on the three promises we strive to keep with Veterans everyday. That same dedication and commitment has been a huge part of our recent improved Customer Services scores.

As he does every month, Dr. Biro visited CAVHCS again this month. And as promised he asked staff about the same questions we identified for everyone that will ensure we continually improve;

- 1) Do doctors and nurses communicate well with patients?
- 2) Is staff responsive to patient needs?

- 3) Does the staff manage patient pain?
- 4) Does the staff communicate with the patient about medicines?
- 5) Did the patient receive pertinent information at discharge?
- 6) Is the patient's room clean and quiet?
- 7) How does the patient rate the quality of overall care?
- 8) Would the patient recommend CAVHCS to others?

In fact, Customer Service has these same questions as well as Survey of Health Experiences of Patients (SHEP) performance measure criteria on a small

card that can be affixed to your CAVHCS IDs.

Students from Carver and Jefferson Davis High Schools particated in this year's Groundhog Shadow work day. Job Shadowing is an academically motivating activity designed to give students a look at a work environment.



### **CAVHCS All-Stars**

I would like to take this opportunity to express my concern of the great professional care I received from the ER, Ward 3A and the supporting staff of all three services. I have experienced nothing but the best in professional care. Many Veterans have passed through these doors I'm sure since their treatment and I am sure it was the best of care and professionalism. As a Veteran I feel strongly that the staff at Montgomery VA is among the best in the VA system providing the "best care anywhere." -- Willie G., Tuskegee, AL

Dear Director,

Mr. William Grant went above and beyond his duties to help me. -- Colby D., God Bless you also.

#### To whom it may concern:

I wish to thank the VA for having such caring warm and thoughtful employees. Ms. Deborah Parham-Ferguson, RN really made me feel good. My prayers and thoughts are with you in your selection of personnel. -- E-4 Kenneth W., Prattville, AL

I am writing this letter to show my appreciation for the excellent care I received during my brief illness last week while I was hospitalized at the Montgomery VA Medical Center. All staff members gave me good care. I was admitted to the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor room 3A-119, but there was a particular nurse by the name of Mrs. Shirley Hardy who I feel went a step above. I am an employee at the Montgomery VA, where I work the midnight shift in housekeeping.

This nurse and myself - I felt did not get along - and I felt that she would be the last person to care for me, but instead she put all her personal feelings aside and gave me excellent care. She tended to my IV site and constantly checked on me to make sure my needs were met in a timely manner. This letter is a write up on her behalf because I feel that she should receive an incentive award and she knows nothing about this letter. If you wish to share it with her, you may do so. -- Sincerely, Don W.

#### The CAVHCS Salute

Accredited by

The CAVHCS Salute is produced by the Central Alabama Veterans Health Care (CAVHCS) Public Affairs Office. CAVHCS Salute is an unofficial, internal communications publication.

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### **Employees of the Month**



# Tuskegee Campus Mr. Stephen Senger, LCSW

Mr. Stephen Senger, LCSW, has been selected as the February 2009 Employee of the Month. He has been commended for his can-do attitude and willingness to assist where needed. He has accepted the challenge as the

social worker for the Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) Clinic, Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) Team as well as his regular duties as the social worker for an Ambulatory Care Team and Diabetic Clinic. He has also served as Acting Supervisory Social worker during my absence. Whenever needed he always responds, "I can do it".

Mr Senger has demonstrated his commitment to social work in providing services to veterans and their families and is an advocate for the Veteran population that he serves and consistently strives to enhance the quality of their lives. Mr. Senger is also one of our nations' heroes. Mr Senger is known for his Multitasking skills and has been very successful in serving on various committees. He maintains a professional attitude at all times and adheres to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics, CAVHCS Mission, Vision and Values and Social Work service Professional Standards.

# Montgomery Campus Mr. George Finlea

George F. Finklea, LPN has been selected for Employee of the Month of February. He has worked on many of the units Image unavailable

through the years. Also he was in Escort Service for a long time and would go to the Veterans' homes to pick them up for their clinic or emergency visits. He is currently working in the Emergency Department. He is known just as George by most of the patients, many know his cell phone number and are accustomed to calling him when they need help.

He is always friendly and kind and willing to help any way he can. He is a joy to know and a pleasure to work with. George never complains about his workload or working before or after his scheduled tour of duty. He is always willing to change his schedule with little to no notice to help cover ED. He has a calming effect on the agitated patients, and he keeps a positive attitude and exudes a peace that is not only helpful for the patients, but for the staff as well.

Mr. Finklea was nominated by Kimberly Urquhart.

### Suicide Prevention Hotline Saves Veterans' Lives

Nearly 100,000 veterans, family members or friends of veterans have reached out for help by calling the Department of Veterans Affairs suicide prevention hotline at 1-800-273-TALK.

The VA initiative, which was launched in July 2007, is part of a collaborative effort with the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, a nationwide network of 133 crisis centers. Calls automatically are routed to the nearest center based on the caller's area code.

The hotline operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and is staffed by trained mental health professionals prepared to deal with immediate crisis. Although the lifeline isn't restricted to military veterans only, callers are prompted to "please press 1 now" if they are a U.S. military veteran or are calling about a veteran. Callers who press 1 are transferred to the nearest VA call center.

More than 2,600 veterans have been "rescued" through the hotline, according to a recent VA statement. "I urge veterans and their loved ones to take advantage of our suicide-prevention program," VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki said in the statement. "Help for these heroes is a phone call away."

An estimated 5,000 veterans commit suicide annually, with Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans 35 percent more likely to commit suicide than the general population. CAVHCS Salute - February 2009 Edition

The trend has grown within the active-duty military ranks too. A steady increase in suicides among veterans and active-duty members has been persistent in recent years. The Army recently announced 2008 as its highest suicide year since 1980, with at least 128 soldiers confirmed to have taken their own lives, while 15 other cases are pending investigations.

VA and active-duty military officials are working with outside research organizations to improve their programs and lower the numbers. The Army and National Institute of Mental Health recently launched a five-year research initiative to gain a better understanding in the hope of preventing suicides in the military and nation.

To identify and treat at-risk patients, prevention efforts and initiatives are in place in each of VA's 153 medical centers and more than 750 outpatient clinics across the nation. Also, suicide prevention coordinators are on hand at each facility.

Troubled veterans, whether they call the suicide prevention hotline or walk in, receive follow-up care almost immediately. Preliminary evaluations occur within 24 hours of requests, and referrals are given for mental health appointments. Comprehensive evaluations are conducted within 14 days, with emergency cases handled immediately.

## Missed Opportunities = Added Costs

Everyone knows that Health Care can be expensive, but few of us consider the costs involved when an appointment is either not filled or not utilized. Central Alabama Veterans Health Care System (CAVHCS) is consistently working to identify strategies, like eliminating Lost Opportunities or missed appointments and their associated costs, to fully utilize its limited resources. And, while systems and procedures are being developed and refined, one strategy involves veterans themselves.

"We need the help of the Veteran," explained Sabrina Hughes, **CAVHCS Director of Customer Service** and Interim Chief of Performance Improvement. "When a Veteran isn't able to keep an appointment there are of course costs involved considering that staff is still here under utilized. But, what many don't consider is the cost to a

fellow Veteran who could have used that appointment if we had time to reassign it."

Of course the costs incurred when CAVHCS cannot fully utilize resources, is not the Veterans' responsibility alone, and CAVHCS is actively involved. "We have staff who call our Veterans the day before their scheduled appointments and confirm that the Veteran is still able to keep the appointment," explained Sue Ormanovich, CAVHCS Systems Redesign Point of Contact and Administrative Officer, CAVHCS Geriatrics and Extended Care. "Sometimes, when the Veteran is unable to keep the appointment, we're able to schedule a new Veteran in that spot. Unfortunately, there are other times when we're not able to contact the Veteran, which is why it is vital that all clinics and providers review and update the Veteran's contact information during each encounter.

"We also utilize an automated system called the "Audiofax," added Ormanovich. "This system also calls the have seen another Veteran who needed care."

Veteran and reminds them of their appointment. The Veteran has the ability to cancel their appointment during this automated call if they need to. Follow-up of the Audiofax and the Pre-calls ensures that accurate clinic cancellations take place."

Updated demographic and contact information is essential to another strategy that CAVHCS is testing, which may eventually be used by the entire VISN. "We are working with a Xerox product called 'STREEM' that will provide a

> variety of mailed reminders to our patients," said Helen Booker, CAVHCS Business Office Chief. "The process involves mailing perforated postcard-sized notices instead of the more expensive letters. After full implementation CAVHCS will be the 'print shop' for other facilities throughout VISN Seven."

Finding ways to fully utilize CAVHCS resources is the continued responsibility for all employees, and

CAVHCS has a System Redesign Outpatient Subcommittee (with Quadrad leadership) whose purpose is to redesign the complex and integrated practices, monitoring missed opportunities and responding to No Shows.

CAVHCS clinics provide daily reports to leadership on capacity and provider utilization. These reports are then reviewed, measured and guidance provided to address identified trends. According to VISN 7 System Redesign Scorecard, CAVHCS' Missed Opportunities track record for FY08 was exceptional. However, considering the impact and costs associated with Missed Opportunities CAVHCS will remain both vigilant and accountable. "Missed Opportunities and No-Shows are slots that are literally wasted," said Ormanovich. "We must be good stewards of the VA Health Care availability and not forsake opportunities where we might

### Stakeholders Meeting Adopts New Approach

CAVHCS conducted a Stakeholders Meeting February 25 in Tuskegee's Building 90 Theater that not only established a new format for future meeetings, but featured discussion on CAVHCS' new Family, Patient Centered Care initiatives.

Veterans from throughout Central Alabama and Western Georgia attended the initial local quarterly Stakeholder Meeting. In the recent past, Stakeholder Meetings have transitioned from twice a year to quarterly meetings held in the Birmingham area. Now, CAVHCS Stakeholder Meetings will be conducted either in Tuskegee or Montgomery in conjunction with scheduled visits by Network Director Dr. Lawrence Biro.

During the February meeting attendees were given an opportunity to identify opportunities for growth as CAVHCS implements new Family, Patient Centered Care

initiatives. Veterans formed three focus groups and discussed eight core concept areas related to Patient Centered Care -

- 1. Importance of Human Interaction. 2. Empowering through Information and Education. 3. Plan of Care/Next Step in Care
- 4. Family Centered Care. 5. Families and Visiting Support
- 6. Environment 7. Nutritional Healing 8. Spirituality



Veterans provided their insights to the direction CAVHCS' Family Patient Centered Care initiatives should take during the recent quarterly Stakeholders Meeting.

## **CAVHCS** Obser ves Black History Month

**CAVHCS EEO Director's Diversity Advisory Program African-American** Committee presented two programs in observance of Black History Month on both Tuskegee and **Montgomery Campuses** February 11. Both programs featured fellowship, song and Guest Speaker Lecia J. **Brooks, Director Civil** Rights Memorial Center, Southern Poverty Law Center.



















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United Methodist Church. "I think that's nice," he said.

Jackson said the hospital has been a help to him in his life. "This facility is fine. It has given me the tools to better myself. This facility has helped me, and I think it has helped a lot of other veterans too," he said.

Along with the students, airmen and officers from Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery also handed out cards to veterans.

"We are here to celebrate Valentine's Day with the veterans," said Airman 1st Class Holly Truong, now stationed at Maxwell Air Force Base and a veteran of Kuwait. Truong said being there was important because these men and women fought for the same reasons we fight today.

Opelikans Lewis Wood and his wife, Mary, are some of the more than 300 volunteers who help serve veterans and veterans' families. "We really do need to show support for our troops," said Wood, a disabled veteran who served in the Navy 23 years, from 1944 to 1967. "One of the best things we can do is to convince our lawmakers to have proper funding for the VA and these veterans," he said.





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(Photo by Eric Johnson)

# March

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	4	5	World 6 Day of Prayer	7
Daylight Saving Trine Begins	<b>9</b> National	10 Patient Safety A	uwareness Week	- www.npsf.org	13	14
VA Cabinet Status (1989) 20th Anniversary	16	National	Pulmonary Reha	ss Week - <u>www.c</u> bilitation Week - Week - <u>www.po</u>	www.aacvpr.org	21
Tuskegee Airmen Activated (1941)	23	American Diabetes Association Alert Day www.diabetes.org/alert	25	26	27	28
29	Win (Si	isabled Veterans ter Sports Clinic nowmass, Colo.) portsclinic.va.gov	American Red Cross Month - www.redcross.org Brain Injury Awareness Month - www.biausa.org National Colorectal Cancer Awareness Month - www.preventcancer.org National Nutrition Month - www.eatright.org National Social Work Month - www.socialworkers.org; www.naswdc.org National Women's History Month - www.nwhp.org National Kidney Month - www.kidney.org			

The CAVHCS Community Calendar is not intended to be an all-inclusive, official calendar. It is intended rather to provide a medium for CAVHCS Salute to share upcoming events.

If you would like to add a CAVHCS event please email details directly to alan.bloom@va.gov. Submissions are not guaranteed to be published. Editorial considerations will be made for propriety, promptness and print space.